

**Minutes of the Meeting of
The Commission to Study the Impact of Immigrants in Maryland
Monday May 9, 2011
Margaret Brent Room, Stamp Union
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742**

The meeting was called to order at 9:20 a.m. Attendance:

Members	Affiliation
Commission Chair	
Larry Shinagawa Ph.D.	Professor, University of Maryland
Ex Officio	
Mark Goldstein	Secretary of Maryland Department of Planning Principal Planner
Nancy McCrea	Secretary of Business & Economic Development Research and Information Director
Appointed by the Governor	
Mark Shmueli	Attorney, Maryland Bar Association
J. Henry Montes	Consultant, JHM Consultation
Kien S. Lee	Community Psychologist, Community Science
Michael C.Lin, Ph.D.	Volunteer, Organization of Chinese Americans
Staff	
Hiram Burch	Manager, Department of Legislative Services
Adam Fogel	Sen. Richard Madaleno's Office
Jim Palma	Maryland Department of Planning
Jeffrey Werling	Executive Director, Inforum / UMCP
Xiaojie Zhang	Research Assistant, Inforum / UMCP
Guests	
Candace Kattar	Identity, Executive Director
Priya Murthy	South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), Policy Director
Lily Qi	Liason, Office of Community Partnerships, Montgomery County

1. Introduction

Acting Commission Chair Mark Shmueli welcomed attendees to the Commission meeting. Each attendee provided a brief introduction of themselves.

2. Testimony by Candace Kattar, Executive Director Identity

Identity provides youth and leadership development programs for Latino youth in Montgomery County (MC). In December 2010, it released the Report of the Latino Youth Collaborative Steering Committee Montgomery County, *Maryland: A Generation of Youth Hanging in the Balance*. This publication can be found on the Identity website: http://www.identity-youth.org/assets/files/Latino_Youth_Collaborative_Committee_Report_December_2010.pdf

The report, prepared in collaboration with the MC government, contains analysis and recommendations for addressing the needs of Latino youth in their schools and communities. Impetus for the current report came from a 2006 needs assessment for Latin youth within Montgomery County (MC) which surveyed schools, families, and over 1000 Latino youth. The findings were distressing. A high proportion of the youth expressed a feeling of disconnectedness from their communities, and pessimism surrounding their futures. Over 70 percent were not engaged in extra-curricular activities, including teams and clubs within the school system and other opportunities within the community, or through volunteer efforts.

Identity shared this information with the County Executive and with other groups including those working with teen pregnancy in the county. The County Executive charged his Latino advisory group to examine these findings. It formed a Latino collaborative, bringing over 60 reps from public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Within the collaborative, three working groups—policy, responsive services, social integration—were formed. The groups looked at violence prevention, education, and the general well being of Latino youth and their families.

In the December 2010 study, the collaborative has recommended that the county must become a more welcoming place for immigrant youth. A Harvard immigration study found that many communities have created a “toxic mirror” where our youth perceive a negative perception of themselves in the eyes of society, then they tend to start identifying with those perceptions in forming their self-identity. It is important to change the public discourse to break the “mirror” of negative societal sentiment.

The December 2010 study provided many recommendations across all three of the working groups.

In particular, the social integration group recommended that the environment at the county level can be improved by:

- A. A new public relations program to change messaging. Leadership must come from highest level of government.
- B. Improved cultural and linguistic competencies of agencies that provide services to Latinos.

- C. Establish a Latino ombudsman. One of the challenges repeatedly heard was the lack of accountability when individuals were not treated fairly (e.g., reprisal against someone who complained about the police department or teachers).
- D. An oversight committee to monitor implementation of recommendations in all departments. Annual report would be given by the County Exec to the Latino advisory committee.

Other comments and answers to questions include:

- County government participated in entire study process. Collaboration across the county occurred. It is very important to hear directly from Latino youth and their families.
- Interestingly, most of the youth chose to do the survey in Spanish. Even among the many youth who had been in the United States for a long time, many were not comfortable taking the survey in English.
- Don't know of any other similar efforts in other MD counties.
- Identity is in ten schools. The school district in MC has been very welcoming of Identity's presence.
- There is a particular student population within the community —youths in junior high or above grades who had interrupted their education in their country of origin and joined the system here with a new language. The program to support these students could be cut. But the ultimate costs for the county may be higher. These young persons, often undocumented, will leave school, often dropping-out, become more disconnected, obtain work requiring very low skills and receiving low pay, and become more likely to be recruited by gangs.

3. Testimony by Lily Qi, Community Liaison, Montgomery County, Maryland

Within the Montgomery County (MC) government, Ms. Qi's job is to partner with community groups to expedite integration of immigrants. There are several ethnic-based advisory groups within the department to help community-based groups, such as Identity, facilitate integration.

Over time, the children and grandchildren of the foreign-born become integrated into society naturally. However, this natural process tends to marginalize the first generation of immigrants. Policy intervention can relieve this situation and help the integration process for subsequent immigrants.

Much of the work of the community partnerships are directed towards immigrant adults with the aim of providing a sense of belonging within the community. The most important function is to provide English language access to different groups of immigrants. Immigrants

prefer to go to organizations and/or places they are familiar with to learn English, as opposed to, say, a community college or university. The County Executive has signed executive orders to increase awareness and accountability for language access in government services. The county government works to institutionalize good practices so language access is seen as an integral part of services, not as a special initiative.

The Liaison office can also serve as a trusted ally and advocate for communities. Part of its mission is to break down bureaucratic barriers. For example, recently Ms. Qi worked with Korean liquor store owners and government representatives concerning MC's new policy to open liquor stores on Sundays.

A couple of years ago when MC proposed to develop a Life Sciences center, the Liaison office helped engage community groups, including those representing groups with much at stake from the proposal, in the conversation. Immigrant scientists and business persons were able to help increase understanding of the proposal within their communities. Increased civil engagement in this case was especially evident among Asian communities in MC.

Still, there are many challenges to integration faced on the ground. Sixty percent of MC foreign-born persons are relatively new to the country, coming since 1990. Their diversity is great, and their dispersion across the state is variable. These factors cause imbalances. For example, more prosperous immigrants tend to move to areas with better school districts, driving up the property value for current residents. Other areas, in contrast, tend to receive larger proportions of poorer immigrants where the need for enhanced school services is already great. On the other hand, the preponderance of Spanish-speaking immigrants means that Asian and African communities are significantly underserved compared to Latino communities.

There is also a lack of understanding among diverse groups in the community, and this causes problems for better participation and integration of foreign born. For example, notwithstanding its desirability in its own right, MC's policy of restricting development in "green" areas has been used to block immigrants from building churches.

Chairman Larry Shinagawa enquired about the issues faced by the youngest of the foreign born who are stuck in the middle between first and second generations. Candace Kattar explained that these young people are growing up with negative messaging about immigrants. Consequently, they reject their family traditions. Immigrant youth are more "Americanized" but are more in danger to fall into gangs with other Americans, like African Americans.

4. Testimony by Priya Murthy, Policy Director, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

SAALT is a national non-partisan group of 42 South Asian (SA) organizations. Working with many other groups, it conducts research, policy advocacy and coalition building. In a recent survey of its constituencies SAALT found two major challenges:

The economic downturn revealed some interesting issues for SAs. There is a general perception in the community that SA immigrants are generally affluent. While this fact is true for many, in Baltimore 32 percent of Indians and 60 percent of Pakistanis are low income. Among these families, more than a third of them reported that a member of their immediate family has lost a job in the downturn. Many lost health insurance. The Muslim Community Center has reported an increase in the number of professionals that have sought free health services. Underemployment is a big issue for SA community, contrary to common perception that SA immigrants are doing well.

Moreover, restrictions due to immigration status are causing a lot of hardship on SA immigrants. Immigrants who might be documented but are limited in English may still not be eligible for social services or they don't know how to navigate the systems to get help, including how to collect health or unemployment benefits.

Ms. Murthy provided the following recommendations:

- Support eliminating restrictions on social services due to immigration status in Maryland.
- Maintain programs that offer job training, housing assistance, and health care options. Increase concerted outreach efforts so people can take advantage of these programs.
- Conduct further research and collect disaggregated data on South Asian community.
- Support efforts that foster collaboration between service agencies within the county government and across governments in MD, VA, and Washington, DC.

5. General Questions and Answer Session

Adam Fogel asked about how a state-wide Secure Communities Program in Maryland might impact relations between youth and law enforcement relations. Candace Kattar responded that Identity conducted a short survey of Latino youths. Some youth have been stopped 16 times but never cited or arrested. Identity presented these results to the MC county executive and other representatives including the police department. Moreover, youth generally don't know their rights. Therefore, they are less likely to come forward when they are victims or witnesses of crime because of their negative relations with police. Secure Communities will increase these problems.

Larry Shinagawa asked Priya Murthy how state and local governments might relieve underemployment in the Asian community. She described a case of an immigrant worker fired when she wanted to change her shift, and she had no recourse. There are domestic workers mistreated by their employers. There needs to be more workers rights information to be distributed and shared with immigrants. Local counties can make sure there is access to information about workers rights.

Henry Montes asked about other communications issues. Lily Qi responded that part of the community liaison's job was to determine where each community goes for information.

Hiram Burch asked how lessons from work with MC at-risk youth can be replicated statewide. Candace Kattar felt that stronger school-communities relations and infrastructure are the first place to start. Lily Qi mentioned that MC created a program called Global Montgomery to help public workers understand different cultures. The program included organized lunch time sessions where community leaders come in and speak to county employees.

6. Discussion on Report Writing.

The commission spent a few minutes discussing the logistics of writing the report. Staff Director Jeff Werling reiterated that current plans are that the report would include the following sections:

- A. Demographic Background
- B. Economics of Immigration
- C. Fiscal Impacts of Immigration
- D. Education Issues
- E. Law Enforcement Issues
- F. Real ID/E-Verify Measures
- G. Community Based Efforts for Immigrant Social Services and Integration

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM.